

Quite naturally also a transformation took place in his character, but it was gradual and even slow. Before arriving at the steadiness and strength of a Christian, his sensitive nature had to undergo bitter trials. The habits of a lifetime were there, the reputation he had with his companions, the counter-attacks of the demon, furious at this beautiful conquest of grace. Against all this Petit-Pierre had quickly discovered one preservative. Every day, wherever we might be, he asked for the Holy Eucharist. Several times when in camp I found him in the morning roaming around near his billet. Flying from dangerous surroundings, where he feared to be dragged down again, he had tramped to and fro throughout the cold winter nights reciting his beads. When I appeared his face would light up. 'Ah! I am going to receive Him!' And when I blamed him in spite of it all, he would reply: 'Don't be uneasy, Father: as long as I have my daily Communion the rest will take care of itself. Besides, I am so happy to offer up a little sacrifice to Jesus in expiation for the past, as the purchase-price of purity.'

Grace sustained him visibly. By its aid he resisted all rillery, silently at first and awkwardly, but soon with an almost reckless gaiety. Dreamer and artist by disposition, he was inclined to be nervous, sensitive, timid of danger or hardship; yet he shrank from no task, and was always preoccupied how he might do a service to others—especially to those who mocked him. To overcome his fear he volunteered for all sorts of patrol duty; at the parapet he looked steadily through the loop-hole deying the muskets pointed at him, and hardly thirty yards away.

A lucky little attack on a German outpost, in which he killed three 'Boches' and saved the life of his N.C.O., enabled him to win the respect of his comrades, and, one morning in December, when I brought him Communion, he said to me radiantly: 'To-day I have a little present for our Lord,' and showed me his sleeves with the red stripes. 'I mean to consecrate my squad to Him, and I promise to win all my men for Him.' Doubtless that was why our Lord led Fred to Petit-Pierre's squad some eight days after his appointment as corporal.

The corporal had shuddered at the shameful words of the newcomer. As leader of the squad he saw at a glance the gravity of the case and the infallible consequences of a denunciation, which others would immediately have deemed obligatory. As an apostle he perceived a much more lofty manner of fulfilling his duty—by saving a soul for God and giving a soldier to France. He acted therefore, as if he had heard nothing. But when night was come and they were on sentry duty at the parapet, he approached Fred quietly, his heart beating quickly under his corporal's tunic, his lips breathing fervent prayers, as he knew this first attempt must win or lose all.

He began by teaching him a good trick for masking the loop-hole in the parapet while firing. Then leaning their elbows on the sacks of earth they talked in low tones on various topics—the Germans who were on the watch beyond them, and whose coughing could be heard, the recent attacks, the war in general—to curse it indeed, but also to recognise that a man had to defend himself and his own. Fred, distrustful at first, expanded little by little. And the conversation came round naturally and amicably to his unfortunate little jest of the morning. Fred was again on his guard. But the boy's voice was so gentle and sympathetic that it touched whatever better fibres still vibrated in the man's heart, and he was quite moved. He expressed regret for the words, 'especially as they have caused you pain, my lad.'

Petit-Pierre continued his work of zeal on the succeeding days with energy and tact. But he had a difficult subject to deal with; the *apêche* held out. When Pierre spoke to me about him, I said, 'Bring him along to me.' 'I'll try, Father,' he replied: 'but as he is at present, you will make no haul of him. No one save only the *Bon Jesus* can change him.' I did not know at the moment that his words were so true.

Christmas was at hand. It was the opportunity of our dreams. Petit-Pierre promised to entice Fred to the Midnight Mass, for which we had made preparations in a half-ruined farm-house near the trenches. Alas! Fred, too, had organised his Christmas celebrations, in his dug-out three yards underground. He spent the whole night there dead-drunk.

A month later Fred, to please his young friend, agreed at length to go with him to the church. This was at C—, in the chapel with windows broken by the shells and holy-water font shamefully defiled by some sacrilegious Germans, but where the Blessed Virgin took her revenge by bringing back to her Son so many souls of our colonials. On this Sunday morning nave, aisles, choir, even behind the altar, every nook and cranny, was filled in advance, and waves of late arrivals pressed round the door.

Fred, who had never crossed the threshold of a church for fifteen years, felt very out of place. Overlooking the crowd by reason of his tall stature, he saw hundreds of 'Porpoises' doing what he thought unworthy of a man—praying. After a time, influenced by the atmosphere of piety and recollection, he strove to recall some snatches of prayer. Meanwhile the hymns, *Pater, man Dieu, Credo, Ave, Ave Maria*, were sung, and he fancied he had heard them before, had sung them even himself. With the old airs there came back to him some of the sentiments they had formerly awakened, an indefinite something that sprang from recesses, ah, what deep recesses! of memory.

The refrains rose in strength and harmony. The deep notes of the reservists mingled with the voices, almost childlike, of the little 1915's, voices that shrilled like clarions summoning to the charge. In this united cry of many breasts there rose so strong an act of faith, so ardent a supplication, that Fred thought he felt a tear gathering on the eyelid. With the back of his right hand, the hand of the dagger, he wiped it away in haste and shame.

The bell at the *Domine non sum Dignus* was rung. After my own Communion I turned to say a few words to this body of men condemned to death. We were to return to the trenches the following day. Of those listening to me how many, before the following Sunday, would have answered the summons of the Master and Judge on High. At least fifty if there were no attack, two hundred or five hundred if there were. And how many of them in the press of duties would have further time for religious exercises. Yet the vast majority wished to be reconciled with God, the rest were nearly disposed, and had they not the right and the duty in their imminent danger to strengthen their soul with the Divine Viaticum? Therefore after commenting on the Gospel of the day, which told of the predilection of the Good Shepherd for the lost sheep, I called on them to make an act of contrition, an act of desire to return to the fold, and a promise of confession when it should be possible. Finally, as always, I gave them the general absolution.

Then followed what a friend called the 'charge to the rails.' Petit-Pierre, with hands folded on his *kepi*, white with mud, came in his turn, not venturing to look at Fred, but doubtless praying very hard for him. Fred hesitated. He turned round. Some comrades did not stir; but they were not acquaintances of his. His heart began beating quickly. Why? He could not well tell. Something drew him to the place where the priest had said to go, where almost all the rest were going, where Petit-Pierre was going with so much joy and beauty on his face. 'After all,' he reasoned—'it was he himself who told me the story of this drama—'that costs nothing and is something which will put me right with the good God.' Thereupon with his long, determined stride he came forward.

When Fred, after taking all possible care to regulate his movements on those of his neighbors, had received Communion and had returned to his place beside Pierre, some infinitely sweet sensation took possession of his heart, a feeling of love, the only true love he had ever known. It seemed to him that the whole past was vanishing, and that a new life was beginning. He kept telling himself: 'Now that you have gone to